

# HIGH COSTS THE MAIN ISSUE

Short runway will also hinder S'pore bid for C'wealth Games, say experts

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Staging the 2026 Commonwealth Games may not make sense for Singapore, experts said, citing reasons such as high costs and a tight timeline.

In search for a new host city following Australian state Victoria's withdrawal, the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) at its general assembly in November 2023 invited all its associations, including Singapore's, to express their interest in taking over.

While the Commonwealth Games Singapore and Sport Singapore (SportSG) have issued a statement saying it was "assessing the feasibility of the invite", staging the quadrennial event will be a difficult task for any country, said Song Seng Wun, economic adviser at financial services firm CGS International Singapore.

Given the scale of the Games, a joint bid with another South-east Asian country would make it more feasible for Singapore, he added.

The 2022 edition in Birmingham featured over 5,000 athletes from 72 nations and territories across 280 events in 20 sports. Singapore took home four gold, four silver and four bronze medals.

But even with a combined effort and the CGF confirming £100 million (\$170 million) in "financial and strategic support", Song was doubtful, given the financial position of countries in the wake of the pandemic.

He added: "In this day and age when the cost of hosting any event has gone up for various reasons, it will be a huge challenge for anybody to pick up from Victoria.

"From a financial standpoint, it will be a big amount and there will be many people saying, 'Why do we need to spend on this when we have to deal with cost of living and issues on the ground?'"

The Birmingham Games cost



The 2022 Birmingham Games (above) cost \$1.33 billion. Australia's Victoria state pulled out when its budget ballooned nearly thrice to \$6.15 billion. ST FILE PHOTO

£778 million (\$1.33 billion) to host.

Last July, Victoria pulled out due to escalating costs, with the budget swelling to A\$7 billion (\$6.15 billion) from the original estimate of A\$2.6 billion.

The Gold Coast, which hosted the 2018 Games, and Perth, also subsequently dropped their joint bid for the 2026 Games, citing a lack of support from the state or federal governments.

After it emerged earlier this week that Malaysia could step in as replacement host, several of the country's current and former senior officials expressed grave reservations, with one even describing such a move as "reckless".

Dr Seshan Ramaswami, associate professor of marketing education at the Singapore Management University, noted the short runway. The 2026 Games are

scheduled from March 17 to 29.

He pointed out that Birmingham had 4½ years of preparation for the 2022 edition, but also highlighted that Singapore has the infrastructure and logistical know-how to pull off such an event.

In the past decade, the Republic has hosted several marquee events such as the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix and will stage other major competitions such as the 2025 World Aquatics Championships and 2029 SEA Games.

CGF president Chris Jenkins said after the general assembly last November that Singapore has "fantastic facilities", adding that he "would love to see the Games come to Singapore".

The Games, which began in 1930, have only been held twice in Asia – Kuala Lumpur in 1998 and New Delhi in 2010 – with the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada

and New Zealand mainly splitting hosting duties.

Holding it here could help enhance Singapore's ambition to become the go-to destination for arts, culture and sports, said Dr Ramaswami.

He said: "An event like this – which requires... thousands of athletes and associated game officials and administrators, and perhaps hundreds of thousands of ticket buyers (the last edition had 1.3 million tickets for sale) – could be a visible marker of Singapore's continuing and evolving relevance globally."

The main concern, he cautioned, would be whether the net expenditure, after accounting for the boost to the economy and increased tax collections, is the best use of Singapore's resources.

When asked in a podcast with The Straits Times in November if

the Commonwealth Games were the kind of event Singapore should host, former SportSG chief executive Lim Teck Yin said financial considerations were crucial to any decision-making process.

He added: "They've run into problems and challenges and they're taking a hard look at it – to see whether there are new formats that would make it less cost prohibitive and still be as attractive to meet the objectives of the CGF themselves."

Song, a veteran economist, said the numbers just did not add up.

He said: "When we put our heart to it, we must deliver that all-in experience and not (commit to events) just because we have the resources. We have the money but we are also pragmatic with how we want to use it."

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